# Why does Classics need Disability Studies?
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Marchella Ward, Oxford (marchella.ward@worc.ox.ac.uk)
Hannah Silverblank, Haverford College (hannahsilverblank@gmail.com)

Beazley Archive 205372; Gregorian Etruscan Museum, Vatican City, Vat. 16541

Fig. 1. Depicts Oedipus, seated on a stone, with legs crossed and postured as though in thought. He is wearing a hat, a cloak, sandals (leg braces?), and a walking stick sits between his legs. Atop a small column sits the sphinx, looking down at Oedipus. Decorative designs surround them in a circular pattern.

τί ἐστιν ὃ μίαν ἔχον φωνὴν τετράπουν καὶ δίπουν καὶ τρίπουν γίνεται:

What is that which has one voice and yet becomes four-footed and two-footed and three-footed?

(Apollodorus' *Biblioteca* 3.5.8. Translated by J.G. Frazer)

1. <u>What is disability studies?</u>

   a. "One of this book's major aims is to challenge entrenched assumptions that "able-bodiedness" and its conceptual opposite "disability" as self-evident physical conditions. My intention is to defamiliarize these identity categories by disclosing how the "physically disabled" are produced by way of legal, medical, political, cultural and literary narratives that comprise an exclusionary discourse. Constructed as the embodiment of corporeal insufficiency and deviance, the physically disabled body becomes a repository for social

anxieties about such troubling concerns as vulnerability, control and identity." (Garland Thomson, 1997, 6)

b. "Disability now resided in a nexus of social relationships connecting those socially identified as impaired and those deemed non-impaired or "normal", relationships that worked to exclude and disadvantage the former while promoting the relative inclusion and privileging of the latter. The new challenge was to: i) describe this nexus of social relationships, that is, to make clear the manifestations of disability in the social world (in organisations, systems, policies, practices, ideologies and discourses) and ii) to explain it, by employing theoretical paradigms that generate ways of understanding what gives form to and sustains these relationships." (Thomas, 2004, 33)

c. "A common assumption would be that some concept of the norm must have always existed. After all, people seem to have an inherent desire to compare themselves to others. But the idea of a norm is less a condition of human nature than it is a feature of a certain kind of society." (Davis, 2017, 2)

**Key terms for today's discussion:**

a. **Impairment vs. Disability:**

   i. "... disability studies differentiates between 'impairment' and 'disability'. Impairment is a term that refers to **the specific corporeal** (including both physical and psychological) **ways in which a body might diverge from the so-called normal** or average body in ways that create functional limitations. The term 'impairment' also serves as a reminder that more than other marginalized identities, disability is one that anyone may pass in and out of because of the relationship of impairment to accident or illness; moreover, the affected individual may at times choose whether to be identified as disabled. The term 'disability' in this context refers to **the social consequences of an impairment in relation not only to the body, but also to social constructions** that result in limitations as well as a social and personal identity. Disability studies has also coined the term 'ableism' to align the oppression of disabled people with that of other marginalized groups; 'ableism' strategically raises associations with racism, sexism, classism, homophobism, and so on, to draw attention to the way that dominant

culture's marginalization of otherness relates to disability." (Millett-Gallant and Howie, 2017, 2)

b. **The medical model:** disability is intrinsic to the body, is a medical issue; focus on cure
   i. "The medical model situates disability exclusively in individual bodies and strives to cure them by particular treatment, isolating the patient as diseased or defective." (Siebers 2006, 173).

c. **The social model:** disability is constructed by society
   i. "The social model, which was and perhaps still is most popular in Britain, demands redefinition of 'able-bodied' and 'disabled' in such a way that society can acknowledge and include the full spectrum of physical types. Disability is no longer individualized as a condition 'belonging' to a person but as one of a number of possible physical states in society." (Wheatley, 2014, 6)

d. **The religious model**: disability is a manifestation of sin / an outward sign of the deviance of the soul
   i. "Since bodily infirmity is sometimes caused by sin, the Lord saying to the sick man whom he had healed: "Go and sin no more, lest some worse thing happen to thee" (John 5:14), we

declare in the present decree and strictly command that when physicians of the body are called to the bedside of the sick, before all else they admonish them to call for the physician of souls, so that after spiritual health has been restored to them, the application of bodily medicine may be of greater benefit, for the cause being removed, the effect will pass away." (From the Fourth Lateran Council, cited in Numbers and Amundsen eds. 1986, 88-89)

ii. "... a system of foundations where, through the intermediary of the church, the generosity of the rich was transformed into the subsistence of the poor, the passage from an economic system based on gifts to a system of exchange. We should add that the ongoing discourse of the Middle Ages claimed that the rich assured their salvation by giving alms to the poor and it thus posited the necessity of the poor for such salvation." (Stiker, 1999, 73-4)

e. **Ableism:** "the insistence on being normal and the accompanying conscious or unconscious discrimination against disabled people." (Davis 2018, 5)

2. <u>What does disability studies bring to Classics?</u>

a. Difficulties in translation of disability terms → cf. Emily Wilson's 2017 *Odyssey* translation & misogynist traditions of translating female characters

   i. "I try to avoid importing contemporary types of sexism into this ancient poem, instead shining a clear light on the particular forms of sexism and patriarchy that do exist in the text... Many contemporary translators render Helen's "dog-face" as if it were equivalent to "shameless Helen" (or "Helen the bitch"). I have kept the metaphor ("hounded"), and have also made sure that my Helen, like that of the original, refrains from blaming herself for what men have done in her name." (Wilson 2017, 89).

   ii. Case study: Ἥφαιστος **ἀμφιγυήεις**

       a. LSJ: Ἀμφιγυήεις , ὁ, epith. of Hephaestus, A.*with both feet crooked, lame,* Il.1.607, etc.

       b. Middle Lidell: ἀμφιγύεις (< γυιός… = "lame"): of Hephaestus, *he that halts in both feet, the lame one*, Il.

c. related terms:

→ LSJ for **ἀμφιγυιόω**: *mutilate,* or *impale,* *Hsch.*, cf. *EM89.17*.

→ LSJ for **γυιός, ή, όν**: lame

→ LSJ for **γυῖον, ου, τό**: *limb, Hom.,* always pl., in phrases such as "γυῖα λέλυντο" Il.13.85… the feet… used of a womb (h.Merc.20), of hands (Theoc.22.121), of the whole body (Pi. N.7.73, Hp.Epid.6.4.26)

→Autenrieth for **γυῖον, ου, τό**: only pl., joints, ποδῶν γυῖα, Il. 13.512; then, limbs, members, γυῖα λέλυνται (see γόνυ), κάματος ὑπήλυθε γυῖα, γυῖα ἐλαφρὰθεῖναι, Il. 5.122; ἐκ δέος εἵλετο γυίων, Od. 6.140.

d. English translations of **ἀμφιγυήεις** in Homer's *Iliad*

αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ κατέδυ λαμπρὸν φάος ἠελίοιο,
οἳ μὲν κακκείοντες ἔβαν οἶκον δὲ ἕκαστος,
ἧχι ἑκάστῳ δῶμα περικλυτὸς **ἀμφιγυήεις**
Ἥφαιστος ποίησεν ἰδυίῃσι πραπίδεσσι. (Hom. Il. 1.606-9)

But when the bright light of the sun was set, they went each to his own house to take their rest, where for each one a palace had been built with cunning skill by the famed Hephaestus, the **limping** god. (A. T. Murray, 1924)

Then when the sun's bright light went down,
they left to go to bed, each in his own house,
Where the famous **crooked-legged** god,
Hephaestus, had made a house for each with skillful understanding. (Caroline Alexander, p. 21)

Ἥφαιστος δέ κ᾽ ἐμὸς πάϊς **ἀμφιγυήεις**
τεύξει᾽ ἀσκήσας, ὑπὸ δὲ θρῆνυν ποσὶν ἥσει,
τῷ κεν ἐπισχοίης λιπαροὺς πόδας εἰλαπινάζων.
(Hom. Il. 14.239-41)

"Hephaestus, mine own son, the god **of the two strong arms,** shall fashion thee [a golden throne] with skill, and beneath it shall he set a foot-stool for the feet, whereon thou mayest rest thy shining feet

when thou quaffest thy wine." (A.T. Murray, 1924)

"Hephaestus, my **crook-legged** son,
will make it, fashioning it with art, and will set a stool beneath your feet,
on which you can rest your shining feet at your revels." (Alexander, p. 299)

**Mythology and Narratives of Ableism**

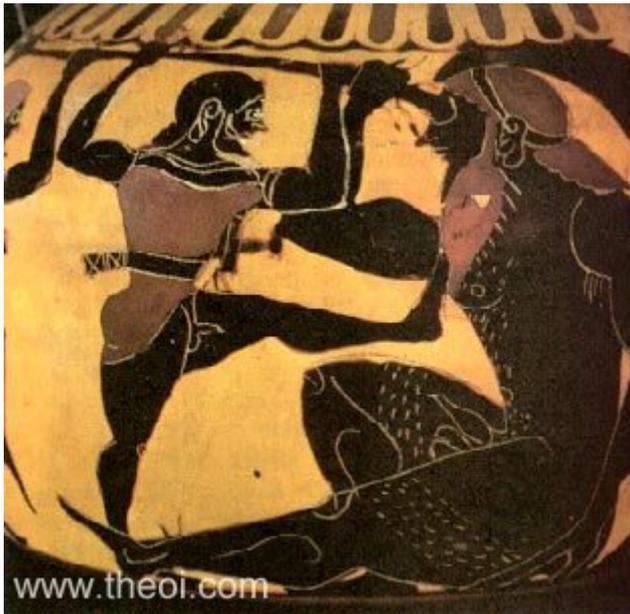1. The "disabled villain" trope: villains coded as disabled



Captain Hook          The Joker (Batman)          Dr. Poison (Wonder Woman)

Odysseus blinds Polyphemus, amphora (530-510 BC), British Museum

2. **Disability as punishment**, e.g., Teiresias (Callimachus, *Hymn* 5), Polyphemus (Homer's *Odyssey* 9), Philoctetes (Sophocles' *Philoctetes*)

3. **Recompense for disability: the "supercrip" trope & inspiration porn**
   a. "Many representations of people with disabilities, however, use narrative structures that masquerade disability to benefit the able-bodied public and to reinforce the ideology of ability. Human-interest stories display voyeuristically the physical or mental disability of their heroes, making the defect emphatically present, often exaggerating it, and then wiping it away by reporting how it has been **overcome**, how the heroes are "**normal**," despite

the powerful odds against them.... In other words, the hero is - simultaneously and incoherently - "cripple" and "supercripple." **This image of disability belongs to the masquerade because it serves a larger ideology requiring the exaggeration of disability, although here it is for the benefit of the nondisabled audience, not the disabled heroes themselves, and this fact makes all the difference.**" (Siebers 2011, 111)

b. "Stories about ordinary people with vision gradually fading from cataracts are not the stuff of legend. Similarly the fact that a blind person can live an ordinary life by relying on senses other than sight is not particularly interesting: divine compensation such as the gift of extraordinary hearing makes a more durable tale. Some blind people were venerated; some were castigated; most went about their business, albeit with more difficulty and physical vulnerability than a sighted person, and are lost from the record." (Rose, 2003, 80)

c. Ancient examples: Homer, Teiresias, Aristotle *Eudemian Ethics* 1248b: ὥσπερ οἱ τυφλοὶ μνημονεύουσι μᾶλλον ("the blind remember better").

d. "Stories about us [disabled people] are boring. As predictable and ubiquitous as they are dangerous, normate narrations of our lives are as straight as they come: one-dimensional narratives of tragic loss and / or progressive normativity. We are dying or

overcoming. We become a burden or an inspiration. We desire vindication or marriage. Our entire narrative worlds are defined by our Otherness, yet revolve around the normates and the normative. These stories cut straight to the point using - and used as - well-steeped, easily readable metaphors bolstered by the requisite piano-based musical cues. If we didn't know us better, we would bore us." (Peers and St. Pierre, 2016, 1)

   a. "An image of a person with a disability, often a kid, doing something completely ordinary - like playing, or talking, or running, or drawing a picture, or hitting a tennis ball - carrying a caption like 'your excuse is invalid' or 'before you quit, try'... These modified images exceptionalise and objectify those of us they claim to represent. It's no coincidence that these genuinely adorable disabled kids in these images are never named: It doesn't matter what their names are, they're just there as objects of inspiration." (Young, 2012)

**4. Heroes 'able' (or abilify) their bodies** (are able to get their bodies to perform above their ability) and they are successful because **they 'disable' others bodies** (make them perform according to their disability), e.g. Odysseus vs. Polyphemus.

   a. The sub- / super- reflex: living beyond death

**Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, 1367-1368:**
οὐκ οἶδ' ὅπως σε φῶ βεβουλεῦσθαι καλῶς
κρείσσων γὰρ ἦσθα μηκέτ' ὢν ἢ ζῶν τυφλός
(I don't know how to tell you that you have been
well advised / you would have been better not to
live, than to be living and blind)

**Polymestor at the end of Euripides' *Hecuba*:**
1. τετράποδος βάσιν θηρὸς (1058)
   … crawling like a beast on four-legs
2. But he has evaded death - the punishment
   Agamemnon suggests for him is not
   disablement but death (876ff).

## 5. "Narrative Prosthesis":

a. "Our phrase 'narrative prosthesis' is meant to
   indicate that disability has been used throughout
   history as a crutch upon which literary narratives
   lean for their representational power, disruptive
   potentiality, and analytical insight. Bodies show up
   as dynamic entities that resist or refuse the cultural
   scripts assigned to them… we want to demonstrate
   that the disabled body represents a potent symbolic
   site of literary investment." (Mitchell and Snyder,
   2014, 49)

b. Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus*, 149-151:
   ἐή, ἀλαῶν ὀμμάτων
   ἆρα καὶ ἦσθα φυτάλμιος; δυσαίων

μακραίων γ᾽, ὅσ᾽ ἐπεικάσαι.

"Oh! Were you sightless even when you were born? Evil have been your days and many, it appears."

## 3. What does disability studies bring to classical reception?

a. The problem of a tradition

  i. "There are few traditions whose emphasis cannot somehow be questioned and there is no objective way of establishing whether something is a tradition, or what is and what is not part of a particular tradition. Marx neatly quipped 'I am not a Marxist'. **This awareness of the role of invention in forming traditions leads on to questions about the reasons for their invention**. Here, as elsewhere, the question *cui bono* can prompt interesting answers." (Budelmann and Haubold, 2011, 24)

b. Historicising the subjectivity of the reader
  i. The refusal to accept the finality of the fragment and the incompleteness of the past, the desire to bridge Deep Time, has driven

scholars into the arms of the mediums and, arguably, into the discourses of classical reception. Reception embodies a promise that Deep Time can be cheated, or even made into an ally: that our own mediumship of history, our own receptiveness, may bring back riches, long-buried. Yet antiquity, as Butler has noted, 'can be extraordinarily resistant to our efforts to know it'. In the collisions between Classics and spiritualism, we can see that resistance at work: both hope and fragility, longing and despair, the presence of the past and its irreparable absence, the space between nothing's lost forever, and forever lost. **In these collisions, we can trace the radical subjectivity of reception: had you seen what I had witnessed (a ghostly hand, a glimpse of Homer, goings-on behind the curtain), you would hold a different opinion.**" (Richardson, 2016, 235)

1. Moving beyond the normate "posture"-situating the reader:

   "All western cultural narratives about objectivity are allegories of ideologies governing the relations of what we call mind and body, distance and responsibility. Feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge,

not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object. **It allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see**.” (Haraway, 1988. 583) and later: “Vision requires instruments of vision; an optics is a politics of positioning.” (Haraway, 1988, 586) and “Rational knowledge is a power-sensitive conversation.” (Haraway, 1988, 590).

c. “Cripping” ancient texts: from pejorative metaphor to reclaimed identity

   i. “The figurative use of a word such as ‘crippled’ reinforces the idea that crippled means broken, defective, and in need of fixing. Because the word is often used metaphorically, the actual lives of those who are crippled are simultaneously erased and stereotyped. **‘Crippled’ is a particularly interesting example because of how the word ‘crip’ (which comes from ‘cripple’) has been adopted by disability activists and scholars in a way that is similar to how LGBT activists and scholars have reclaimed the word ‘queer.’** Many disabled people identify as crips, and **to crip something does not mean to break it but to radically and creatively invest it with disability history, politics, and**

**pride while simultaneously questioning paradigms of independence, normalcy, and medicalization."** (Taylor (2017) 12), cf. also the tend in film / theatre criticism to compare "cripping up" to "blacking up", eg. Ryan, 'We wouldn't accept actors blacking up, so why applaud cripping up?', *Guardian*, 13 January 2015.

d. **Claiming antiquity in disability studies: revisiting figures from Greek myth**



1. Grappling with the Graiae: "In the hall of mirrors that is world mythology, there are none more ghastly, more disturbing to the eye, than the three Graiae, sisters of Medusa—whose own ghastliness turns onlookers to stone. Possessed of a single eye and six empty eye sockets, the three hags pass their eyeball from greedy hand to greedy hand in order to catch a glimpse of the world around them. Is the

lone eyeball of the Graiae blind while in transit from eye socket to eye socket? Or does it stare at the world as it moves from hand to hand? If so, the eye is more than a metaphor for the experience of the disabled body. It is its reality, and therefore should tell us something about the construction of reality. The hand is the socket of seeing for the Graiae, just as it is for every other blind person. The blind alone do not live this way. All disabled bodies create this confusion of tongues—and eyes and hands and other body parts. For the deaf, the hand is the mouth of speech, the eye, its ear. Deaf hands speak. Deaf eyes listen." (Siebers 2006, p. 173)



2. Crab-walking with Hephaistos:

"If Hephaestus has so many stories, why should we believe that disability was silenced in ancient Greece? If Hephaestus was so respected and celebrated as a tradesman and an artist, why should we believe that craft art art, that rhetoric and expression, are exclusively the realm of the 'able-bodied'? Hephaestus might become not just a model for 'alternative' versions of agency but also a model for the agency we might all have access to, once we are willing to consider reversing, moving sideways, facing traps… I want to suggest that the world we write (through our histories,

our research, or in our classrooms) partially constructs disability. So we can see disability as deficit, or we can recognize potential. I argue for the latter." (Dolmage 2006, 135-6).

3. Identifying with Venus:



G: I got a weird image, letting my eyes flood with light. You got pale and looked like the Venus de Milo.

D: My mother's friend one time gave her a candle of the Venus de Milo. And I came home and they lit it. I thought there was something symbolic there. That was terrible.

G: Did you identify with it?

D: Oh yeah! I was going with a black guy named Rico and I gave him a big statue of the Venus de Milo for his birthday. He loved it. His wife got mad and broke it over his head. He re-glued it. It was pretty, too.

G: She's an image of you, really. She doesn't have legs.

D: And also the one arm is shorter than the other. That's what's so weird, too. Also Diane is Greek. Or Roman. Diane is the other name for Venus.

As we talked, Diane and I discovered that we shared the feeling that the Venus de Milo did not seem to be missing limbs but was intended that way—and that she was beautiful in her own right. This experience permanently altered my perception of Diane as disabled. Her body need not be seen from the point of view of its deficits but as integrated and complete. That is how Diane herself seems to experience her body." (Frank 2000, 94-95)

6. <u>Classics & exclusion of disabled people and perspectives</u>
   a. Barriers to Classics:
      i. Classics as a discipline that enshrines and perpetuates an exclusive notion of normalcy (ideas of value / beauty / form)
      ii. Discourses of disability come from elite authors
      iii. "Disability has always been constructed as the inverse or opposite of higher education. Or, let me put it differently: higher education has needed to create a series of versions of 'lower education' to justify its work and to ground its exceptionalism, and the physical gates and steps trace a long history of exclusion… Further, the ethic of higher education still encourages students and teachers alike to accentuate ability, valorize perfection and

stigmatize anything that hints at intellectual (or physical) weakness." (Dolmage, 2017, 3)

    iv. "Historically, disabled people have been the objects of study but not the purveyors of the knowledge base of disability" (Mitchell and Snyder, 2005, 198)

b. Inclusive pedagogical futures:
    i. Language & terminology
    ii. Accessible material
    iii. Theorised histories
    iv. Cripping the curriculum?

## Selected Bibliography

*This list primarily provides references for the texts we mention in our conversation today.*

→ For more exhaustive bibliography on classics scholarship that considers disability, see C. Laes' "Disability History and the Ancient World (ca. 3000 BC-700 CE): A Bibliography." https://www.academia.edu/31221058/Disability_History_and_the_Ancient_World_ca._3000_BCE_-ca._700_CE_._A_bibliography.

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